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Polystylism and Stylistic Adaptation in 1970s Jazz-Rock: The Case of Return to Forever’s “Duel of the Jester and the Tyrant (Part I & Part II)”¹

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“The user [musician] is the one who creates the style.
I don’t ask myself ‘does this work as jazz?’
I’ll create the music I need without thinking about style.”²
-Chick Corea

Introduction

“Was fusion jazz the ‘path of the sellout’ or a shining new direction in jazz history?”³ Steven Pond’s question gets to the heart of the debate around the critical reception of the polystylism found in 1970s jazz. Groups associated with fusion or jazz-rock (e.g. Mahavishnu Orchestra, Return to Forever, Herbie Hancock Head Hunters, Tony Williams’ Lifetime) drew from multiple genres to further their practices, and such techniques often expanded and diversified their audiences.⁴

Criticism of fusion has been well-documented, from Amiri Baraka’s description of “dollar sign music,”⁵ to Leonard Feather’s comment that 1970 was the “Year of the

¹ Earlier versions of this article were presented at the 2016 Rhythm Changes Conference (Birmingham City University), the 2016 Project Conference on Progressive Rock (University of Edinburgh) and at the 2017 annual meeting of the American Musicological Society (Rochester, NY). I am grateful to a number of people for comments and questions on this research, including Katherine Williams, Monika Herzig, Nolan Stolz, members of our departmental writing group (Emma Hornby, Lindsay Carter, Raquel Rojo Carillo, Paul Rouse, Kate Guthrie, Chris Charles, Sarah Hibberd, Argun Çakır, and Sara Garrard), Ben Norton and the two anonymous reviewers for this article. Thanks to Chris Charles for typesetting the musical examples.

² Len Lyons, *The Great Jazz Pianists: Speaking of Their Lives and Music* (New York: William Morrow and Company, 1983), 265.

³ Steven Pond, *Head Hunters: The Making of Jazz’s First Platinum Album* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2005), 3.

⁴ While academic studies of jazz in the 1970s are still relatively neglected, there exist important foundational studies of the jazz fusion era, including Pond’s book on *Head Hunters*, Stuart Nicholson, *Jazz-Rock: A History* (London: Canongate Books Ltd., 1998) and Kevin Fellezs, *Birds of Fire: Jazz, Rock, Funk, and the Creation of Fusion* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011). See also this journal, Vol. 4, no 1 (2010) special issue: “Rethinking Jazz through the 1970s,” guest editor Eric Porter.

⁵ Amiri Baraka and Amina Baraka, *The Music: Reflections on Jazz and Blues* (New York City: William Morrow and Co., 1987), 177.

Whores,”⁶ to Stanley Crouch’s description of Miles Davis in this era as a “licker of monied boots.”⁷ For these jazz critics, the use of electronic instruments seemed to betray some acoustic sanctity in jazz. Electrification, amplification, and virtuosity in jazz fusion was compared to similar features in progressive rock, with its associations with whiteness, excess and a soulless complexity for complexity’s sake. Stuart Nicholson goes as far as to suggest that the fusing jazz with what he calls ‘pomp rock’ led to the fall of jazz-rock altogether: of the album *Romantic Warrior* by Return to Forever he wrote that it combined “the worst of two worlds: a fusion of jazz’s populist urges and rock’s elitist ambitions.”⁸

Despite the sonic similarities between Return to Forever and progressive rock groups like Yes and Gentle Giant, they were treated separately in a largely race-based genre system while not necessarily accepted by critics of either camp.⁹ Nicholson’s quote, which borrows liberally from sentiments expressed twenty years earlier by Robert Christgau,¹⁰ became my starting point for an investigation of the relationship between what the critics heard and what a polystylistic analysis could reveal.

⁶ Leonard Feather, “A Year of Selling Out,” *Down Beat 16th Annual Yearbook: Music ’71*, 10. He continues, “Never before, no matter how grievous the economic woes of jazz musicians...at any prior point in jazz time, did so many do so little in an attempt to earn so much.” Also quoted in Fellezs, 68-69.

⁷ Stanley Crouch, *Considering Genius: Writings on Jazz* (New York City: Basic Civitas Books, 2006), 240, 256, originally published as “Play the Right Thing: Miles Davis, the Most Brilliant Sellout in the History of Jazz,” *The New Republic*, February 12, 1990.

⁸ Nicholson, *Jazz-Rock*, 229. More specific criticism of Chick Corea’s electric periods and of Return to Forever include that the group was a “disappointing band,” an “idle quartet of virtuosos” that had “turned to profitable bombast in the 1970s.” Jon Pareles, “Return to Forever at the Palladium” 1983 *New York Times*, available at: <https://www.nytimes.com/1983/04/04/arts/music-noted-in-brief-return-to-forever-at-the-palladium.html?rref=collection%2Fbyline%2Fjon-pareles> ; Jon Pareles “A Past in Rock is Forgiven as Corea Comes Home” *New York Times* April 13, 1998. Available at: <https://www.nytimes.com/1998/04/13/arts/jazz-review-a-past-in-rock-is-forgiven-as-corea-comes-home.html?rref=collection%2Fbyline%2Fjon-pareles>

⁹ Matt Brennan has written a thorough study of the rise of *Down Beat* in the 1930s and *Rolling Stone* in the 1960s and the relationship between jazz and rock critics. While his timeline ends before the period I investigate in this article, his book is key for establishing the attitudes toward each genre and how they became so segregated. Matt Brennan, *When Genres Collide: Down Beat, Rolling Stone, and the Struggle Between Jazz and Rock* (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2017).

¹⁰ Robert Christgau’s review of *Romantic Warrior* states, “Right on schedule, two or three years behind John McLaughlin, Chick Corea tries to eat the fusion cyclotron. Where McLaughlin fell for a few silly orchestral trappings, Corea essays pompous, ersatz-classical compositions--while continuing to display Al DiMeola, Stanley Clarke, and Lenny White in all their dazzling vacuity. Jazz-rock’s answer to Emerson, Lake & Palmer--the worst of both worlds. D+,” originally published in the *Village Voice* and *Creem*, available at https://www.robertchristgau.com/get_artist.php?name=Return+to+Forever

This article explores the adaptation of classical styles to the musical idiolect of Return to Forever and its leader Chick Corea.¹² I focus on the final track of the aforementioned *Romantic Warrior* (1976) album, “Duel of the Jester and the Tyrant (Part I & Part II),” and I investigate its formal features, themes, polystylism, album art, and specific instances of stylistic adaption from Western Art Music. Though “Duel” also adapts ideas from funk, a genre considered to be “black music,” the quasi-prog/rock reception (and comparisons with Mahavishnu Orchestra) further solidified RTF’s associations with an Anglo-Saxon, Western European white heritage. In reality, the Latin, classical and jazz influences in Part I, and swing and funk in Part II, complicate any definitive racialized genre categorization. The threat of destabilisation in the established genre system may be one reason as to why critics, and later academics, were so vocally against jazz fusion.

The underlying racial assumptions behind criticisms of jazz musicians’ use of rock (as “selling out” to wider/whiter audiences) is an important part of this story, as critics were implicitly drawing from the well-documented race-based genre system that only increased as record labels became more powerful in the 1970s.¹⁴ A critique of jazz fusion through a racial lens could be interpreted as critics telling musicians to ‘know their place’ so to speak within genres associated with particular racial demographics. The close reading of often scholarly-neglected intra-musical features in jazz fusion, however, highlights the musical performance of racialized genre tensions as a potentially transgressive act, looking at how these expressions were achieved on a harmonic, thematic and timbral level.

¹² I am using the term classical not to refer to specific era associated with the classical style (1750-1820), but to include Western Art Music more generally (including, for example, styles such as Baroque music and 20th century composers such as Berg and Hindemith). A similar strategy is used in Michael Long, *Beautiful Monsters: Imagining the Classic in Musical Multimedia* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008).

¹⁴ To cite one example, in 1972, Columbia Records commissioned the Harvard Business School to study the soul music market. “The Harvard Report” recommended the expansion of “custom label activity” and it was during this period that most of the major labels set up Black music divisions or made deals with R&B independent labels, and a number of black artists went to sign with major labels during this period. Reebee Garofalo, “Industrializing African American Popular Music,” in *Issues in African American Music: Power, Gender, Race, Representation*, eds. Portia Maulstby and Melonee Burnim (Abingdon: Routledge, 2017), 99. See also Jeremy A. Smith, “‘Sell it Black: Race and Marketing in Miles Davis’s Early Fusion Jazz.” *Jazz Perspectives* 4/1 (2010): 7-33.

By applying Soviet composer Alfred Schnittke's 1971 concept of "stylistic adaptation" to the work of Return to Forever, I focus on Corea's personal idiom rather than the previously used terms stylistic reference, allusion or crossover. In so doing, I want to develop stylistic adaptation as a musicological tool,¹⁵ to encourage its further use into the lexicon of musical scholarship. In homing in on Corea's personal idiom, I am not trying to suggest that he was the only creative voice in the group. Each member of the band provided their own stylistic idioms which added to the overall sound of the group (their idiolect).¹⁶ This variety in individual style no doubt added to the polystylism that helped define the group. Corea, however, was the credited composer for "Duel" as well as the overall dominant artistic voice of the group, one whose style we can map over a long period of time and find various patterns and themes.

While there are countless analytical methods for studying musical intertextuality of all eras,¹⁷ I consciously utilize a contemporary writer-composer such as Schnittke to exemplify the 1970s as a period of heightened polystylism in multiple genres, and while Corea/RTF and Schnittke were not necessarily influencing each other directly, the two were

¹⁵ I am using the term "style" in the musicological sense of the term, as did scholars such as Leonard Ratner and Leonard B. Meyer, to include intra-musical elements of the recorded text, and I am using "genre" from both film studies and as a music industry marker, acknowledging that the two categorizations can overlap and cross-influence and that fan communities will not necessarily adhere to such distinctions. For more on how these terms have been used in respective disciplines, see Allan F. Moore, "Categorical Conventions in Music Discourse: Style and Genre," *Music & Letters* 82/3 (2001): 432-442.

¹⁶ For example, each member of RTF was working on a solo album in 1975 right before the *Romantic Warrior* sessions. An interview with Clarke from 2018 recalls that Corea encouraged him to write songs from the start. Corea said to an initially-reluctant Clarke that if he wrote a song for the first album he would name the album after the song, and kept his promise as *Light as a Feather* referenced the one Clarke-penned song on the album. Clarke expands, "Even though he was really young, in his late twenties he had the insight as a bandleader to be generous....Chick was very generous to do that." Sodajerker on Songwriting Podcast, "Episode 116 – Stanley Clarke" (9:30-10:30) Available at: <https://www.sodajerker.com/episode-116-stanley-clarke/> (Accessed 26 July 2018)

Given how collaborative the group was, the compositional input into the songs were no doubt more complex than the publishing credits on the album would suggest (each member wrote one song on *Romantic Warrior* with the exception of Corea who wrote three).

¹⁷ A good starting point for studies of musical intertextuality across eras is Peter Burkholder, "Borrowing," *Oxford Music Online*. Available at: <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/grovemusic/view/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.001.0001/omo-9781561592630-e-0000052918> (accessed 26 July 2018).

part of a similar Zeitgeist in which a rise in polystylism emerged alongside changes in various social, technological and musical contexts.

Stylistic Adaptation and the Polystylistic 1970s

In a 1971 essay called “Polystylistic Tendencies in Modern Music,” Schnittke discusses a number of contemporary compositional strategies, one of which he calls “adaptation”:

In the same category [of polystylistic method] may be placed the technique of *adaptation*—the retelling of an alien musical text in one’s own musical language (analogous to modern literary adaptations of ancient subjects) or a free development of alien material in one’s own style.¹⁸

He cites pieces such as Webern’s *Fuga* (“Bach’s music reinterpreted in a variety of timbres”) Pärt’s *Credo* (“Bach’s notes, but Part’s music in the way the notes are rhythmically and texturally transformed”), and Klusak’s *Variations on a Theme of Mahler* (“How Mahler might have written, had he been Klusak”) as representative of the technique.¹⁹ Schnittke himself employed collage-style intertextual composition; amongst other pieces his Symphony no. 1 from 1974 demonstrates such strategies.²⁰ In his article, he acknowledges that while Western Art Music before this era been polystylistic, “in recent times the polystylistic method has become a conscious device.”²¹

Though Schnittke was working in a different generic and geographical context from RTF, his concern with how new techniques can express the political and social contexts of

¹⁸ Alfred Schnittke, “Polystylistic Tendencies in Modern Music,” in *The Alfred Schnittke Reader*, ed. Alexander Ivashkin (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002), 87.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ While Schnittke employed polystylism throughout his career, the exact nature of the polystylism in his compositions changed over time. See Peter J. Schmelz, “Tonality After ‘new Tonality’: Silvestrov, Schnittke, and Polystylism in the Late USSR in Tonality Since 1950”, eds. Felix Wörner, Ullrich Scheideler and Philip Rupprecht (Franz Steiner Verlag, 2017), 233-258.

²¹ Schnittke, 89.

the time mirrors the high degree of intertextuality found in other art music composition (Berio, Zimmerman, Crumb, Kagel), and that such practices and commentaries play out in the same era as fusion's rise and fall. According to Schnittke, the merits of a polystylistic method were now "obvious":

It widens the range of expressive possibilities, it allows for the integration of 'low' and 'high' styles, of the 'banal' and the 're-cherche'—that is, it creates a wider musical world and a general democratization of style. In it we find the documentary objectivity of musical reality, presented not just as something reflected individually but as an actual quotation (in the third part of Berio's symphony we hear an ominous apocalyptic reminder of our generation's responsibility for the fate of the world...) And finally it creates new possibilities for the musical dramatization of 'eternal questions'—of war and peace, life and death.²²

Some of this rhetoric may sound overly dramatic, but given post-1968 political and economic situations, with Vietnam, Watergate, the Cold War, and global economic crises (including the "Era of Stagnation" in the Soviet Union), artists were responding to such contexts in these ways, and with greater access to musical materials. The increasingly fragmentary nature of the global economy, including a growing trend for outsourcing labor, could also be reflected in such fragmentary art.²³ For composers of multiple genres, the 1970s were a period where new techniques could be employed to represent and make sense of the changing contexts. One might argue that jazz musicians were late to the party, given that already-existing styles such as "Baroque rock" had been adapting classical styles into rock since the mid-1960s.²⁴ I

²² Ibid., 90.

²³ For more on this point, see Kay Dickinson, *Off Key: When Film and Music Won't Work Together* (New York City: Oxford University Press, 2008).

²⁴ Sara Gulgas writes of "Baroque rock" created by and for a counterculture that was reacting against modernism, the mainstream, and traditional norms. The use of music from a distant past (e.g. the harpsichord in The Beatles's "In My Life" from 1965), what she calls postmodern nostalgia, becomes interpreted as a form of hipness. Sara Gulgas, "Looking forward to the Past: Baroque Rock's Postmodern nostalgia and the politics of memory," PhD thesis (University of Pittsburgh, 2017).

would argue, however, that polystylism intensified in the 1970s, and that “jazz fusion” albums were becoming a broad umbrella term within the industry, an artificially-constructed “genre” that could not necessarily be defined stylistically.

For example, if we were to compare Miles Davis’s *Bitches Brew* (1970) with Return to Forever’s *Hymn of the Seventh Galaxy* (1973), The Tony Williams Lifetime’s *Emergency!* (1969), Herbie Hancock’s *Head Hunters* (1973), and The Mahavishnu Orchestra’s *The Inner Mounting Flame* (1971), sonically, these albums are all substantially different in terms of timbre, arrangement, form, harmonic and melodic material let alone the styles employed and how they are used. Fellezs notes a “broken middle” of the “ain’t jazz, ain’t rock” of fusion’s musicians and their output, the deliberate *in between-ness* of playing with genre by deliberately not belonging to either.²⁷ Furthermore, many fusion bands were racially integrated (and transnational), thus complicating the essentialized narratives of “black music” (and “white music,” and “American music”) and the relationship between race and genre most overtly played out in the music industry. The communication and collaboration with the other members of Return to Forever encouraged a virtuosic sound which was amplified through new technologies, creating associations with the most virtuosic of rock musicians. In terms of Corea’s personal idiom, he is not working “in between” genres so much as literally fusing and adapting multiple stylistic influences into an already-developed personal idiom.

Investigating cross-genre interaction and intertextuality as a temporally-situated rather than genre-situated phenomenon would also consider that similar contexts gave rise to the 1973 founding of the Charles Ives society, and in the same year, DJ Kool Herc first played pre-existing funk and Latin records in a radically different way to give birth to one of the

²⁷ One of the defining features of fusion was that musicians consciously stayed in between genres. To quote Kevin Fellezs, they “Articulated a way of being both inside and outside of genre categories, disturbing assumptions about musical traditions, including the ways in which membership (legitimacy), mastery (authority), and musical value are ordered.” Fellezs, 5. To quote Fellezs further, “Genre is the index against which musical value is determined by critics, musicians, and fans alike, despite almost universal disavowal for drawing rigid lines around musical practices. Indeed, like the category of race, genre continues to hold discursive sway despite widespread acknowledgement of its limits, elisions, and errors.” Ibid., 15

most intertextual genre cultures: hip-hop.³⁰ While there will no doubt be certain limits to such a cross-genre perspective, investigating the 1970s as a particularly fertile era for polystylism reveals motivations and sonic manifestations beyond either academic silence or critical dismissals of such cross-genre practices. From a practical standpoint, many musicians would have been rehearsing and recording in close proximity to one another. By this logic, Schnittke's compositional ideas can exist alongside Corea's and such a synchronic analysis may reveal meanings otherwise ignored or hidden in genre-based scholarship. The social and technological conditions of the 1970s meant that artists were drawing on similar polystylistic approaches, and using pre-existing materials in new ways to new ends.

Chick Corea

Corea's first experience with electrification in jazz was as pianist for Miles Davis (*Filles de Kilimanjaro* in 1968 followed by *In a Silent Way* in 1969 and *Bitches Brew* in 1970). Like other Miles Davis sidemen Keith Jarrett and Herbie Hancock, Corea was reluctant to have the Fender Rhodes thrust on him by Davis and kept performing in acoustic ensembles such as with his free jazz group Circle from 1968 to 1971.³¹

His stylistic eclecticism continued after Circle, and inspired by the writings of L. Ron Hubbard, Corea left Circle and formed the group Return to Forever which he led in various iterations from 1972-1977 (all with bassist Stanley Clarke, see Table 1). Inspired by watching a performance by the Mahavishnu orchestra,³² Corea hired guitarist Bill Connors who was

³⁰ Jazz was not the only genre to be navigating multiple cultures in the 1970s. In the realm of pop music (Dolly Parton, Joni Mitchell, Stevie Wonder), art music (Zimmerman, Berio, Reich, Stockhausen), "horn bands" (Blood Sweat and Tears, Chicago, Cold Blood, The Ohio Players) and rock (Yes, King Crimson, Queen), artists and groups were playing with styles and new technologies that defied simple categorization.

³¹ For a more extensive biographical sketch, see Monika Herzig, *Experiencing Chick Corea: A Listener's Companion* (Lanham, Rowman and Littlefield, 2017).

³² "After Airta and Flora couldn't make the gigs," recalled Corea, "Stanley and I wanted to continue on. One night we went to the Felt Forum and heard the Mahavishnu Orchestra play. I had never experienced anything like that before. I had met John when he first came to New York and I knew he was incredible, but this band was something different—with Billy Cobham and all the power and sound coming off the stage and John

later replaced by a 19-year old Al DiMeola. The band reached large, enthusiastic audiences with vibrant and virtuosic shows,³³ and received a contract from Columbia Records for what was to become *Romantic Warrior*, recorded at Caribou Ranch in 1976, and was their best-selling album, eventually going gold.³⁴ Despite having a multi-million dollar deal, the group split and re-formed with a new lineup for the group's final studio album, *Musicmagic* (1977). Corea is still musically active at the time of this writing, including taking part in a Lincoln Center retrospective in 2011 and Festival for him in 2013, and a two-month residency at the Blue Note for his 75th birthday in 2016. Many of these retrospective concerts have emphasized the acoustic phases in his career, failing to represent the range of output in his over-fifty-year career.

<<INSERT TABLE 1 HERE>>

***Romantic Warrior* (1976)**

Romantic Warrior was RTF's first release on Columbia, a label that under its president Clive Davis (1967-1973) signed numerous artists after the 1967 Monterey Pop Festival (Janis Joplin, Blood, Sweat and Tears, Chicago), and was at the forefront of producing jazz fusion releases in the 1970s: Miles Davis's *Bitches Brew*, *On the Corner*, *Tribute to Jack Johnson*. Mahavishnu Orchestra's *The Inner Mounting Flame* (1971) and *Birds of Fire* (1972), and

playing all that stuff. And I looked at Stanley and I said, 'I want to write for a sound like that.'" Don Heckman, "Where Have I Known you Before?", *JazzTimes* August 2008, available at:

<http://jazztimes.com/articles/19429-return-to-forever-where-have-i-known-you-before> Corea was equally awed by aspects of the McLaughlin performance that reached beyond the power and the sound. "The thing that impressed me," he continued, "was that the rhythms they were playing and the melodies and the way they were playing was wild. And yet the sound that was coming out of this electric guitar and the drums roaring and playing strong backbeats sometimes made the audience think it was rock 'n' roll. They got the emotion of it. I thought, Wow, that's incredible. And I wanted to play to those people. I didn't want to just play to people sitting seriously in a jazz club, with their head in their hands trying to figure out the chord changes." Ibid.

³³ Clarke recalls "'Out of the three top fusion bands—Mahavishnu Orchestra, Weather Report and Return to Forever—we had the best compositions. We used to do lots of gigs with Fleetwood Mac, Bachman Turner Overdrive, David Bowie. We used to blow those bands off the stage because people would hear all this stuff that they'd never heard. It was intricate music. We were precise, much like classical music, and audiences had never seen that. When that door was opened we walked right through it.'" (Willard Jenkins, "Fusion Warriors," *DownBeat* 73, no. 5 (May 2006): 58), also quoted in Herzig, 80.

³⁴ The album was dedicated to the founder of Scientology, L. Ron Hubbard. It reached no. 35 on the Billboard 200 and no. 3 on the Billboard Jazz Album Charts. Herzig, 80.

Herbie Hancock's *Head Hunters* in 1973, which was the first jazz album to go platinum.

Columbia's place in the story cannot be underestimated: their record sales jumped from 15% of the market in 1964 to 60% in 1969, reflective of their conscious strategy to become the dominant label for jazz fusion.³⁵

Romantic Warrior was a collaborative effort of strong musical voices that had been extensively touring together (Corea said they considered themselves a "live group"³⁶ as opposed to a studio-recording entity). While creative input was no doubt provided from all members, Corea's long career, musical output, and leadership role in the group meant that much of the material bears his stylistic stamp, what Leonard B. Meyer would call "personal idiom" for classical repertoire.³⁷

In terms of stylistic influence, Corea states in a March 1976 cover story for *Down Beat* that the band is influenced primarily by jazz and classical, and under that, rock:

Corea: But it's more the rock phenomenon that we draw from rather than the rock music.

Berg: What do you mean by phenomenon?

Corea: The scene. You know: the concerts, the large audiences, the attempt to communicate with electronics and big sound systems, and the music business."³⁸

For Corea, communication is a recurring theme in interviews, a concept that Corea points to L. Ron Hubbard for inspiration. Corea seems to suggest in his quote a hierarchy of generic

³⁵ Stuart Nicholson, *Jazz-Rock*, 59. Jeremy A Smith has written on Columbia's marketing strategies to rock and other countercultural audiences, and Miles Davis's attempts to go against them in the interest of "selling it black" rather than white. Smith's study of the 70s music industry focuses on genre, race and album art in particular. See Smith, "'Sell it Black': 7-33.

³⁶ This is echoed in Corea's liner notes for the CD reissue of *Romantic Warrior* in 1999 by Sony Music Entertainment. 'The Legacy of Columbia Jazz' Reissue series produced by Bob Belden, digitally remastered by Mark Wilder, Sony Music Studios NYC.

³⁷ What Leonard B. Meyer calls an "idiom," the personal style of the composer, as a compositional strategy (as strategies, laws, then rules form Meyer's tripartite set of constraints of learned processes within musical style). See Meyer, *Style and Music: Theory, History and Ideology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989). This methodology arguably works for someone with as distinctive a compositional voice as Corea.

³⁸ Chuck Berg, "Professor C.C. and His Amazing Perpetual Communication Company," *Down Beat*, March 25, 1976, 14.

influence for RTF, with jazz and classical at the forefront while aspects such as venue, performance and playback technology and marketing are drawn from rock (rather than melodic or harmonic techniques, for example).

If the intention *was* to hybridize jazz and classical rather than use rock music explicitly, the sonic output still very much resembled aspects of progressive rock.³⁹ Like other fusion groups, they were using volume as an expressive tool as well as technology to communicate multifaceted ideas. Visually, comparisons to progressive rock can be seen in the album cover, designed by Wilson McLean (Scottish designer who did covers for *Time* Magazine, Broadway show stamps and many other endeavours). The cover (Figure 1) depicts a medievaesque knight, with a castle on the hill in the background, nodding to prog's emphasis on the past and mythological topics. The aesthetics conceptually point to Rick Wakeman's *The Myths and Legends of King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table* as an influence, released ten months earlier in April 1975, although RTF's album is more semantically open, not least due to the absence of lyrical content.

<<INSERT FIGURE 1 HERE>>

One of the clear stylistic similarities with progressive rock is the inspiration found in classical music. Corea's interest in classical has been widely documented: his love of Bela Bartok, Bach, Beethoven and Mozart is stated alongside his influence from bebop pianists like Bud Powell, flamenco and other Latin musics.⁴⁰ Instances of Corea's interest in and

³⁹ According to long-time collaborator vibraphonist Gary Burton, the prog rock group King Crimson was a big influence on both him and Corea. Quoted in Nicholson, 25.

⁴⁰ He provides a long list "The Pianists I've Studied and Been Inspired by" in his book *A Work in Progress... On Being a Musician*. (Chick Corea Productions, 2002): Bartok, Beethoven, Bley, Brubeck, Childs, Chopin, Gayle Moran Corea, Debussy, Ellington, Feldman, Friedman, Gould, Gulda, Hancock, Hill, Bach, Basie, Berg, Borge, Byard, Chiterson, Cole, Cora, Economou, Evans, Flanagan, Garland, Grusin, Hammer, Harris, Hines, Horowitz, Jarrett...." Asked about his repertoire for piano practice, Corea replied "Alban Berg's Piano Sonata is one of my favorite piano works. I'll play anything by Bach, some of Chopin's etudes, Mozart sonatas, or Messiaen's piano music." Michael Cuscuna, review of *Piano Improvisations* Volume One (sound recording), by Chick Corea, in *Down Beat* 39/9 (May 1972), 266. Videos available on *YouTube* also show him improvising over classical pieces of music which show his comfort with both idioms and how he can integrate the styles into his own. Examples include Scriabin's Prelude no. 2 (https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=18&v=-BqLi3U-

citation of classical music in Return to Forever go back as early as “Spain” which opens with the 2nd movement of Rodrigo’s *Concierto de Aranjuez* (also used in Miles Davis’s *Sketches of Spain*)⁴¹ and carry on throughout his career: writing two piano concertos, a trio for flute, bassoon and piano, as well as performing Mozart K466 (d minor) and K488 (a minor) for *The Mozart Sessions* (1996) with Bobby McFerrin.⁴² By no means the first jazz musician interested in classical music,⁴⁴ Corea uses classical ideas in a variety of ways and is able to adapt them to his own styles in a hybrid manner rather than a performance of separate stylistic topics in succession.

“Duel of the Jester and the Tyrant (Part I and Part II)”

The final track on *Romantic Warrior* is entitled “Duel of the Jester and the Tyrant (Part I and Part II).” Tables 2 and 3 graphically show the sheer stylistic variety within the piece, and the frequency at which styles, sections, synthesizer timbre and themes change. The piece is in line with Corea’s postbop approach to harmony in that it does not follow a Western classical hierarchy (ii-V-I), often leaving the sense of a tonic home ambiguous.⁴⁵ More audible harmonic structures in e minor are found in Themes 2 and 3 which are vamped/repeated for solos. Other passages have a high degree of bi-tonality, quartal harmonies, and unison passages that make an overall harmonic scheme difficult to decipher. However, if e minor is considered the primary key, then the overall direction is a minor v to I progression overall, where we only receive finality on the last chord of the piece (A major).

[oc](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9OthNenOt5Q)) and 4 (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9OthNenOt5Q>), and Chopin’s Mazurka op. 17 no. 4 (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AZUiJkmtX78>).

⁴¹ Corea also has an arrangement of “Spain” for full orchestra.

⁴² More examples include the late 70s duet concerts with Herbie Hancock features Bartok’s *Mikrokosmos* no. 7. “My Spanish Heart” emulates a Rachmaninoff piano concerto style, and he has written a number of chamber works as well as his own piano concerto.

⁴⁴ While a number of examples could be listed, I’ll point to the Third Stream movement (coined and championed by Gunther Schuller in 1957) to refer to a musical genre that attempted equal fusion of jazz and classical music. Schuller instituted a Third Stream department at the New England Conservatory which was subsequently re-named the Contemporary Improvisation department.

⁴⁵ For more on Corea’s postbop techniques, see Keith Waters, “Chick Corea and Postbop Harmony.” *Music Theory Spectrum* 38/1 (2016): 37-57.

<<INSERT TABLE 2 HERE>>

On the macro level (Table 2) we could divide the piece into introduction, part I, swing transition into the funk-based part II followed by a long coda. Both part I and II have room for solos, giving a sense of openness for instrumental virtuosity, while formally, sections are heavily through-composed.

At a greater level of detail, table 3 shows the stylistic variety of sections, features of Corea's personal idiom, key centers and synthesizers used.⁴⁶ The introduction, in terms of melodic material, can be divided into four sections that are not repeated (though some of the 4ths motive returns at the end). Part I consists of an initial theme (in Cmaj7) which quickly transitions via bi-tonality to a second theme which is harmonically structured as descending ostinato from e minor to B and then repeated for solos. Theme 1 returns as a repeat of material and as transition to the next section which also includes a swung-eighth note passage that acts as a transition to the primarily funk-based Part II which opens with Theme 3. This section could be divided into three parts, the third being a timbrally humorous-sounding transitional passage over a circle of fifths.⁴⁷

A long coda section contains a series of closing passages before introducing new ideas based on 4ths and pentatonic scales. The first part of the coda is held together by a structural two-bar motive, which I am calling theme 4, which anchors disparate material such as quasi-Baroque counterpoint, drum solos, unison 4ths passages and unison pentatonic passages before recapitulating material heard in the introduction and ending to great fanfare (and gong) on an A major chord.

⁴⁶ Herzig's book also lists the synthesizers listed in "Duel" in her chapter on Return to Forever's electric period. Herzig, *Chick Corea*, 80-81. The list of synthesizers was originally compiled in Ernie Rideout, "Where have we heard them before? Chick Corea and Return to Forever Reunite to Remind us of some of the Greatest Fusion Ever." *Keyboard*, July 2008: 24ff.

⁴⁷ Due to jazz's current "serious music" status, musical humour is something which often goes uncommented on in the genre, as well as the "sound of surprise" to cite a book title by jazz journalist Whitney Balliett. An exception includes Paul Steinbeck, "Intermusicality, Humor, and Cultural Critique in the Art Ensemble of Chicago's 'A Jackson in Your House'" *This Journal* 5/2 (2011): 135-154.

<<INSERT TABLE 3 HERE>>

Complexity of arrangement has been described as a feature of progressive rock. John Covach compares the stylistic worlds of progressive rock and fusion through looking at “Medieval Overture” from the same album, and many of his observations would also apply to “Duel”: he writes, “This highly arranged aspect of the music is drawn from prog, where almost any passage from Yes, Gentle Giant, King Crimson, and many others could be brought forward as an example.”⁴⁸ One could also point to earlier big band traditions as well in terms of arrangement, though both progressive rock and “Duel” take stylistic variety much further than most big band pieces (John Zorn’s “Saigon Pickup” from *Naked City* (1990) might outdo this in stylistic variety, and in a much less hybrid manner). On a macro-scale, “Duel”’s polystylism sonically represents the multi-generic and multi-racial spaces found in the group, disrupting purified and fixed notions of such concepts. It also adapts classical forms and embellishments into these newer styles, hybridizing polystylism with features of Corea’s style.

In terms of Corea’s personal idiom, “Duel” demonstrates the “single-section forms” and “heterarchical view of harmonic organization” in his works, two of his features outlined by Keith Waters.⁴⁹ Theme 1 in Example 1 shows an example of this harmonic trait, and it also demonstrates his “preference for chromatic-third relationships involving major seventh chords.”⁵⁰ These harmonic decisions seem in line with Corea’s stylistic idiom that goes back to his earliest Blue Note recordings (“Windows,” for example), and thus can be heard as jazz

⁴⁸ John Covach, “Jazz-Rock? Rock-Jazz? Stylistic Crossover in late-1970s American Progression Rock.” In *Expression in Pop-Rock Music: Critical and Analytical Essays*, ed. Walter Everett. 2nd Edition (London: Routledge, 2007), 97.

⁴⁹ Waters, “Chick Corea and Postbop Harmony.”

⁵⁰ Steven Strunk, “Tonal and Transformational Approaches to Chick Corea’s Compositions of the 1960s.” *Music Theory Spectrum* 38/1 (2016) 16-36.

influenced. However, examples such as theme 1's harmonic interest in third relationships exist in both post-tonal composition (e.g. Scriabin) and in jazz (e.g. Coltrane).

Features in "Duel" that are common to many of his works include the unison lines in Intro C or at the final coda of the piece (Example 2), and the polychord triads in the transition from theme 1 to 2 (Example 3),⁵² and the descending tetrachord in the theme 2 vamp (the first solo section, example 4).⁵³ The descending e minor progression (i-VII-VI-V), popular in Spanish music, is in a number of Corea's works from the opening of "Sometime Ago," "Free Step," "Eye of the Beholder," "Song of the Pharaoh Kings," and his "Piano Concerto no. 1."

<<INSERT EXAMPLE 1>>

<<INSERT EXAMPLE 2>>

<<INSERT EXAMPLE 3>>

<<INSERT EXAMPLE 4>>

"Duel" demonstrates Corea's interest in exploring the percussive possibilities of melody, either in unison with other band members, or in octaves on a range of keyboard instruments.

Herzig also points out features common to his style which can be found in the piece:

Baroque-like embellishments (especially here in the coda), independence of left and right hand (again in the coda), syncopated rhythms, octave-doubling, 4th voicings (example 5), polychords, ostinati, or vamps.⁵⁴ Lastly, Daniel Duke's study of Corea's *Piano*

Improvisations, Volume One notes that Corea has a "classical approach to form," utilizing rondo and variations in addition to drawing from classical melodic and harmonic ideas found in early 20th century works.⁵⁵ These forms provide both a vehicle for improvisation and for a

⁵² In example 3, I have included both the originally published chord symbols and as a polychord, i.e. Em9+11 and D/e as two labels for the same chord.

⁵³ Many of these stylistic features in other Corea works are outlined in Herzig's foundational work on Corea's musical style. See Monika Herzig, "Chick Corea – A Style Analysis." *IAJE Research Proceedings*, 1999.

⁵⁴ Ibid. See also Jordan Michael Lynch "Where have I known This Before? An Exploration of the Harmony and Voice Leading in the Compositions of Chick Corea," Master of Music Thesis, Bowling Green State University, 2012.

⁵⁵ Daniel Alan Duke, "The Piano Improvisations of Chick Corea: An Analytical Study," Unpublished DMA Thesis. Louisiana State University, 1996. An analysis of harmony, melody and rhythm as opposed to

high degree of polystylism and harmonic complexity. Duke also notes that features of his style such as complex harmonies, altered chords, extended chords, polychords and quartal harmonies have origins in late 19th or 20th century classical music and can be found in jazz so that “there are indications, such as his familiarity with works of Berg and Messiaen, that he might have encountered this harmonic language in both idioms.”⁵⁶ For Corea, perhaps in part due to these shared musical traits across styles, he sees no boundaries between jazz and classical, and I suspect, he believes no barrier to exist between the other styles that he uses as influence either.⁵⁷ <<INSERT EXAMPLE 5>>

Looking at Corea’s personal idiom as a base with which to start, we can now focus on how he is able to adapt other styles to his own. In musicology, a number of terms have been used for the use of pre-existing styles: quotation, borrowing, paraphrase as well as wider stylistic allusion. Covach points to “stylistic crossover” in fusion and progressive rock, and also uses the term “stylistic reference” in his analysis of Yes’s “Close to the Edge.”⁵⁸ Serge Lacasse discusses the “transtylation” of hypertexts like cover versions, for example, Paul Anka’s swing version of “Smells Like Teen Spirit.”⁵⁹ In writing on the classical in popular culture, Michael Long notes musicians utilize the “classical register” to create an “imaginative classic” which functions in the vernacular, without any fidelity to 18th and early 19th century styles (e.g. the Hollywood film scores of Steiner and Waxman, or classical

synthesizer timbre risks leaving out an important aspect to Corea’s reception, but nevertheless are the parameters that best show his stylistic adaptation of classical music to his personal idiom. His use of synthesizers could be considered a timbral adaptation on top of the other features, and one that is structurally integral to the sonic identity of this music.

⁵⁶ Duke, 10.

⁵⁷ Corea states in a 1991 interview that “I’m trying to break down the barriers, actually, between jazz music and classical music. There’s such a rich tradition and a rich esthetic in both areas that I love to operate in. I see no barrier myself...” Fred Bouchard, “Chick Corea: Akoustic Again,” *Down Beat* 58/2 (February 1991).

⁵⁸ John Covach, “Progressive Rock, ‘Close to the Edge,’ and the Boundaries of Style.” In John Covach and Graeme Boone, eds. *Understanding Rock: Essays in Musical Analysis* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 3-31.

⁵⁹ Serge Lacasse, “Intertextuality and Hypertextuality in Recorded Popular Music.” *The Musical Work: Reality or Invention?* Ed. Michael Talbot (Liverpool: University of Liverpool Press, 2000), 35-58.

infused pop such as Barry Manilow's "Could it Be Magic," or King Crimson's *In the Wake of Poseidon*).⁶⁰

But when dealing with an artist or a group that has so well established a personal style that alluding or referencing others still bear the stamp of her/his personal idiom, such terms may not do.

Returning to Schnittke's stylistic adaptation, "the retelling of an alien musical text in one's own musical language,"⁶¹ it invites us to explore how this might work in the adaptation of "classical ideas" into a rock or a jazz context and compare and differentiate between different forms of classical borrowings.

For example, if we look at the opening phrase of "Duel" in example 6 the unison line and its post-tonal character give the impression of a 12-tone composition. It is not, but all 12 notes are presented in the 20-note phrase, although there is repetition of notes before all 12 are presented—and Corea's quartal harmonic style is demonstrated in the opening passage and then reflected in the opening chord (Csus2) at bar 11 which is followed by a series of sus2 chords before landing on a Gsus4. Corea's quartal style is thus hybridized with a 12-tone effect, and as often is the case in his work, triadic harmonies are eschewed in both the 4ths and his proclivity for sus 2 and sus 4 chords.⁶²

A second example can be found in the first part of the coda of "Duel" which gestures to Baroque performance, examples 8a and 8b, part of a series of material that draws out the work's final conclusion. The two sections are bounded by the structural motive/theme 4 (example 7) and I would argue that the quasi-counterpoint presented reflects a "stylistic

⁶⁰ Long, *Beautiful Monsters*.

⁶¹ Schnittke, 87.

⁶² Corea's use of sus2 and sus4 chords can be heard in all phases of his career, but perhaps most notably in this 1980s Elektric Band period. Nolan Stolz has recently engaged in a neo-schenkerian analysis of "King Cockroach" (1986) which argues that the Ursatz (fundamental structure) of the piece can be reduced to a sus2 chord [027] instead of a standard triad. Nolan Stolz, "A Neo-Schenkerian Hearing of Chick Corea's 'King Cockroach' (1986)" Paper presented at the 38th Annual Meeting of the Society for Music Theory, St. Louis, Missouri (2015).

adaptation of the Baroque counterpoint style” to Chick Corea’s personal idiom. To paraphrase Schnittke—“How Bach might have written had he been Chick Corea.” While the phrase is anachronistically problematic, the usefulness of the concept lies in the existence of a distinctive “alien” style, and a similarly distinctive compositional style with which to adapt it.

We may be able to illustrate this difference between allusion and adaptation by comparing the “fugato” stylistic reference in Yes’s “Close to the Edge” (used by John Covach)⁶³ with the classical-esque “coda” in “Duel.” For the latter, the two sections transition from what we might hear as Baroque “counterpoint” (Example 8a) which textually resembles a Handelian overture or a J.S. Bach keyboard work to a more rhythmic interplay characteristic of Corea’s style (Example 8b) while still gesturing to the Baroque, not to mention the timbre of the Yamaha organ evoking some sense of a “learned style.” Many of the trills, harmonies and other ornamentations suggest Baroque styles while fusing with newer rhythmic and melodic ideas from jazz and Latin music. It exemplifies an adaptation of Baroque counterpoint to Corea’s polyrhythmic style.

In the Yes example (Example 9), we have a stylistic allusion to fugue given its attempt to follow some of its “rules” (e.g. repeating melodic and harmonic material an octave above after the first entrance) and in “Duel” we have more of an adaptation of counterpoint to Corea’s personal idiom, using harmonies and rhythms associated with Corea while texturally opening the section as if there was a ground bass. In both cases, we have two modes of creating a classical *effect*, Long’s “imaginative classic” that functions within the pop culture vernacular.⁶⁴

⁶³ John Covach, “Progressive Rock, ‘Close to the Edge’, and the Boundaries of Style” in *Understanding Rock*, eds. John Covach and Graeme M. Boone (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), example 1.1, 11.

⁶⁴ For the sake of illustration, another, perhaps more familiar, example of stylistic adaptation from the same year would include Stevie Wonder’s “Sir Duke” from *Songs in the Key of Life*. Written as a tribute to Duke Ellington after his death in 1974, one could assume that he is trying to capture some of Ellington’s spirit in the horn heavy composition (as he did for his Bob Marley tribute “Master Blaster” in 1980). However, no one would mistake “Sir Duke” for an Ellington or Strayhorn composition—the pentatonic lines, for one, is a Stevie Wonder stylistic trait, not an Ellingtonian one. This musical reception of Ellington via Wonder’s personal style

Conclusion

By engaging in a close analytical reading of “The Duel of the Jester and the Tyrant (Part I & Part II),” I present one mode of investigating an academically neglected jazz fusion group that was popular with particular communities of fans and musicians (for example, *Keyboard* magazine writes of how its readers wore out the grooves on those Return to Forever albums).⁶⁶ Most studies of fusion or jazz-rock give little attention to Chick Corea and Return to Forever, and events such as the 2011 Jazz at Lincoln Center retrospective of Corea’s music also omit any fusion works (neither RTF nor works with his 1980s Elektric Band).⁶⁷ This risks not reflecting accurately the “musical migrations”⁶⁸ of the 1970s, a period that “transformed the relationship of individual musicians to musical traditions.”⁶⁹

As I have shown, Corea and RTF’s music are the product of 70s polystylism, postbop harmonies, virtuosity, improvisation, communication, and complex forms alongside a growing industry interest in fusion. In applying Schnittke’s concept of stylistic adaptation to a jazz-rock example, I have provided a terminological and methodological alternative to “crossover” or “allusion,” more accurately describing Chick Corea’s artistic practice with Return to Forever. The track provides a useful case study of how a composer adapts ideas from another style to his/her own. This study of Corea’s personal idiom and wider polystylistic practices of the 1970s is one example that demonstrates how intertextual

would fit the category of stylistic adaptation (“How Duke Ellington might have written, had he been Stevie Wonder.”)

⁶⁶ “If you were a jazz-minded drummer, bassist, guitarist, or especially a keyboardist in the '70s, you probably wore out the grooves on the LP versions of these albums. As Chick himself is quick to point out, RTF was just one of several wildly talented and adventurous groups at the time--but RTF was a must-hear. Each of these four musicians influenced a generation of players. Simply put, this group set the bar way high.” Rideout, 24.

⁶⁷ Ben Ratliff writes, “There was no electric guitar or bass, no keytar, no chimes. The list of tunes curved away from the real pop and bombast in Mr. Corea’s back catalogue, the later iterations of the group Return to Forever and the Elektric Band. (And Mr. Corea wore a dark jacket and tie, as opposed to his usual Hawaiian shirts.)” Ben Ratliff, “A Jazz Man Returns to His Past” New York Times Jan 23, 2011, available at: www.nytimes.com/2011/01/24/arts/music/24corea.html?_r=0 (accessed November 24, 2017).

⁶⁸ Fellezs, 14.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 5.

contexts can work together in order to show the relationship between intra-musical material and its critical reception.

While Covach notes that generic crossover (as industry strategy) differs from stylistic crossover (the intra-musical realm), genre categorizations can set up expectations that are subverted through our reception of the actual sounds of the music.⁷³ The “performance of transculturality,” to cite a term used by Fellezs, was read by critics as a desire to be commercially viable at the expense of artistic integrity, but the lens that critics were using seemed outdated.⁷⁴ These musicians were trying to communicate with audiences and each other, use new technologies and whatever else was at their disposal to achieve this. The Lincoln Center-ification of Corea risks diminishing the genre-disrupting musicality of the 1970s fusion era and also ignores the strength of Corea’s personal idiom to traverse multiple stylistic universes, adapting these styles to his own.

⁷³ Covach, “Jazz-Rock? Rock-Jazz?” For David Brackett, he sees genre as “the point of articulation between music analysis—the formal or technical description of music—and the social meanings and functions of music.” Quoted in Fellezs, 16.

⁷⁴ As David Ake, Charles Hiroshi Garrett and Daniel Goldmark note in the introduction to their collection *Jazz/Not Jazz*, jazz has never been a monolithic genre, with malleable and contested definitions since its early inception. *Jazz/Not Jazz*, eds. Ake, Garrett and Goldmark (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012), 17-18.

Syn. 47

mf Cmaj7

Amaj7 Fmaj7

Example 1. Theme 1.

182 184

Gtr.

Example 2. Unison Lines (coda)

53 *Three times* 55

Em9+11 F#m11 Abmaj7+5 Gbmaj7+5 Abmaj7+5 Gbmaj7+5 Abmaj7+5 Gbmaj7+5

Example 3. Polychords

59 Play up stem notes 2nd time only

Am Bm Cm G/E D/E C/E

Opt. repeat for additional solos

On cue Syn. & Gtr.

No chord *mf*

Example 4. Theme 2.

73

Am7sus4 Bbm7sus4

Example 5. Quartal harmonies

Moderately fast (♩ = ♩)

Piano

Smoothly
No Chord
p Bass and Pno.

Guitar

11 Syn., Gtr.

mp Csus2

Ped. *

mp

Example 6. Opening Phrase.

113 Syn.

f N.C.

Example 7. Theme 4 (structural motive)

116 Pno.

mf

Gtr.

mf

The musical score is divided into five systems. Each system contains a piano (Pno.) part and a guitar (Gtr.) part. The piano part is written in treble and bass staves, and the guitar part is written in a single staff. The key signature has one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 4/4. The score includes various musical notations such as notes, rests, and dynamic markings like 'mf'.

Example 8.a (Codetta A) (Counterpoint 1)

The musical score for Example 8.b, Codetta A (counterpoint 2), is presented in six systems. The first system features a piano (L.H.) and guitar (Gtr.) part. The second system continues the piano and guitar parts. The third system shows a piano and guitar part. The fourth system shows a piano and guitar part. The fifth system shows a piano and guitar part. The sixth system shows a piano and guitar part. The score includes various musical notations such as notes, rests, and dynamic markings (f, mf).

Example 8.b. Codetta A (counterpoint 2)



Example 1.1. "Close to the Edge" fugato

Example 9. Yes, "Close to the Edge" (from Covach 1997)⁷⁵



Figure 1. Return to Forever, *Romantic Warrior* (Columbia Records, 1976)

⁷⁵ Originally printed as example 1.1 in John Covach, "Progressive Rock, 'Close to the Edge', and the Boundaries of Style" in *Understanding Rock*, eds. John Covach and Graeme M. Boone (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 11.